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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000463

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PNAT](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT FORMATION UPDATE: HIZBALLAH LEADER
SAYS SADRISTS WILL SEEK TO BLOCK ALLAWI'S INCLUSION IN
GOVERNMENT; MUTLAK DREAMS HE'LL BE KINGMAKER

Classified By: POL COUNS Robert Ford, reason 1.4 (b)

11. (C) Summary: Iraqi politicians are still adjusting to the victory of incumbent Prime Minister Jafari being named again by the Shia Islamist Coalition to be its prime minister nominee. A key element of the Shia Coalition, the SCIRI party, is worried about the rising influence of the rival Sadrist group within the government. One story making the rounds is that the Sadr-affiliated Mahdi militia intimidated some of the Shia Coalition independents to vote for Jafari. Meanwhile, outspoken Sunni Arab politician Saleh Mutlak predicted SCIRI in its discomfort would eventually break ranks with the Shia Coalition. The question political figures will ask over the next couple of days is whether the Shia List 555 Coalition will, in fact, hold together despite SCIRI and Coalition partner Fadhila's unhappiness with Jafari and Sadr. End Summary.

12. (C) In a February 14 meeting with poloffs, Hizballah of Iraq movement leader Hassan Radi Khadim al-Sari predicted that unity government formation would be difficult and may face delays, especially when the Sadrists refuse to consider Ayad Allawi's participation. He insisted, however, that dialogue will overcome any difficulties and that Abd al-Aziz al-Hakim will play an influential role in this process.

13. (C) Sari, who is SCIRI-aligned, expressed surprise that the Shia independents did not vote as a bloc on February 12 for Adil Abd al-Madhi. According to al-Sari, the independents met before the vote and determined that the majority of members planned to support Abd al-Madhi. As a result, they agreed to vote as a bloc for the SCIRI nominee. During the February 12 vote, Al-Sari described that each voting member was called one-by-one to the stage, wrote the name of his/her choice on a ballot and dropped it into a ballot box. Despite his surprise at the outcome, Al-Sari considered the vote fair and the ballot secret.

14. (C) SCIRI senior official Shaykh Humam al-Hamudi was clearly unenthusiastic about Jafari in his late February 14 conversation with PolCouns. He and colleague Akram al-Hakim complained about Mahdi Army intimidation of independent voters, especially women; they blamed Abd al-Madhi's loss to Jafari partially on this. They were wary of the Sadrists gaining more influence in the next government. (They asserted that the Sadrists are seeking three ministries in the next government: Transport, Trade and Labor. The latter, they noted caustically, controls social security payments and is a plum for corrupt picking. On February 14, Defense Minister Dulime told polmiloff that the Sadrists would make a grab for the Interior Ministry.) Despite their discomfort with Sadr, these SCIRI officials also are not rushing to break ranks with the rest of the Shia List 555 bloc. Hamudi said that he and Hakim would

travel to Najaf on February 15 to consult with Sistani. Hamudi made clear he would not mind if the Kurd-Sunni Arab-Allawi bloc stopped Jafari, but he gave no indication that they would publicly encourage that bloc to do so.

15. (C) Separately, Dialog Front leader Salih Mutlak told Poloff February 14 that his bloc's 11 parliamentary deputies' votes could prove decisive in the event that the Jafari government formation bid fails. Mutlak said he planned to meet Muqtada Sadr in a few days to discuss the options. Because of its unhappiness about Jafari, SCIRI will, in his view, join the Kurd-Allawi-Sunni Arab coalition and abandon plans for the quick establishment of a federal region in the South. There are serious splits on this issue within SCIRI, said Mutlak, and Hakim will not prevail. He noted the likely PM candidates for the coalition would be Allawi (who would be rejected by Sadr) and Nadim al-Jabiri (who would be rejected because of his inexperience and Ba'thist past). He hinted that with his 11 seats, he would like to emerge as the consensus candidate for the PM role. Mutlak claimed he is also leaving open throwing his support to Ja'fari in exchange for two sovereign ministry posts (e.g., Interior and Oil). He claimed to be playing it coy with Kurds, who have twice invited him to sign on to the Erbil agreement, which he has not yet done. His advice to the USG was to keep Iraqi political parties struggling for awhile and then step in and impose a government with a strong leader at the helm (presumably Mutlak). "We need a dictator" he said. The US should either fix what is wrong with Iraq or "leave us alone."

16. (C) Comment: Mutlak is mercurial and at times -- such as his prime ministerial aspirations -- provides sorely

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needed comic relief. Not surprisingly, several members of Mutlak's Dialog group have told Poloff that they have signed separate deals with the rival Sunni Tawaffuq coalition. IIP leader Tariq al-Hashimi made a similar assertion to Poloff February 13 (septel). Mutlak is a factor in Iraqi politics, however, because he is frequently on Arabic television and people watch. Meanwhile, Sari's assertion that the Sadrists may delay government formation in an attempt to exclude Allawi is both familiar and more realistic. As the outcome of the February 12 Shia List 555 nomination vote continues to sink in, new rumors are circulating as to what more the Sadrists may demand of Jafari in exchange for their decisive support. Ppolitical figures and observers will be asking whether or not the Shia List 555 Coalition will hold together or whether elements of that Coalition will signal support, direct or indirect, for the rival Kurd-Allawi-Sunni Arab bloc. End Comment.

KHALILZAD